

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL, AAHM, 2010
JACK D. PRESSMAN-BURROUGHS WELLCOME FUND CAREER DEVELOPMENT AWARD
REVIEW COMMITTEE
Conevery Bolton Valencius (chair), Keith Wailoo, and Erika Dyck
29 March 2010

The 2010 Competition

We received 10 applications, from a range of schools, geographies, and areas of focus. Past efforts at publicity appear to be paying off: while still modest, this number of applicants doubles that of the last several years (in 2007 we received three applications; in 2008 and 2009, we received five each).

The selection procedure was essentially the same as in previous years: all applicant materials were sent by their chair, either by mail or (increasingly this year) by email, to the other two committee members. Committee members judged the applicants' proposals on (1) the overall excellence and originality of the project ; (2) what it will add to the history of medicine and public health; and (3) the do-ability of the proposal to complete the project (what difference would this award make in the development of the book?) .

We conducted discussion via email (with the option of a conference call if necessary). As in past years, committee members agreed to recuse themselves from discussion of proposals for which they had written letters of recommendation, and we were careful about to outline our level of intellectual interaction with candidates in the interests of full disclosure and transparency.

This year, several unsuccessful applicants wrote back to ask the panel for any advice on crafting their book proposals, and I wrote them back letters of informal response based on our committee discussions. In the past three years, this form of feedback has been regularly provided to every applicant: members of the Review Committee have recorded comments and advice on each proposal, which the Committee Chair has collected and sent along with the notification letter. Given sufficient energy, we encourage future committee members to continue to provide brief comments for each applicant. Several past applicants have mentioned the usefulness of this feedback, and we feel it is a way to provide important mentoring to all participants, not only the award winner.

2010 Award Winner

The committee is very pleased to award the 2010 Pressman-Burroughs Wellcome Award to **Matthew Smith** for his project *Food for Thought: Hyperactivity, Food Additives and the Feingold Diet*.

Dr. Smith earned his PhD in 2009 at the Centre for Medical History, University of Exeter. He is currently a Wellcome Trust Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Centre for Medical History, University of Exeter.

Food for Thought: Hyperactivity, Food Additives and the Feingold Diet explores the medicalization of hyperactivity in North America by investigating debates over the diet recommended in 1974 by allergist Ben Feingold. Challenging the contemporary pharmaceutically-oriented treatment for hyperactivity, Feingold instead championed a rigorous diet focused on avoiding all food additives. The so-called “Feingold diet” was seized upon by desperate parents and eager media, but soon discredited by medical authorities dismissive of its forms of evidence. Conventional histories hold that the Feingold diet faded because clinical investigation failed to prove its worth.

Dr. Smith sets out to challenge this accepted wisdom and write a more nuanced history of this contested treatment, pointing out the many socioeconomic, cultural, and even personal factors involved in widespread dismissal of the Feingold diet. Further, Smith challenges historians of medicine to broaden our frameworks of how to write a history of disease or of medical treatment. How might notion of “medicine,” for instance, include the complex politics of organic foods? How might we rethink and triangulate our models of the doctor-patient model to encompass the advocacy done by concerned parents?

Food for Thought merges elements of environmental, food, childhood and medical history and promises to offer an in-depth cultural history of this epidemic childhood disorder in a manner that embraces current historiographical trends. Matthew Smith is crafting a history that will be of use both to those in the midst of active debates about hyperactivity in children and to those interested in writing careful histories of medicine, medical science, and healthcare. This promises to be an original, synthetic, and broadly appealing book that we on the committee are most eager to read.

Suggestions for Future Competitions

We are heartened by the apparent success of recent electronic advertising of the Award, and we encourage future Committees to continue increasing the visibility of the Award, especially to develop the diversity of schools and programs represented.

The Committee Chair wrote to all applicants asking them how they’d found out about the Award and asking for suggestions for additional places to post. In their response, most applicants mentioned listservs and websites (mostly H-NET, AHA, and AAHM, but one applicant specifically mentioned seeing the award posted on the BSHS website). A few also mentioned personal recommendations by peers and mentors. This is good news: these responses meant that the Award is indeed more visible in places we have tried to make it more visible.

We are pleased by the recent centralization by the Council Secretary of award announcements, so that each committee chair could perhaps focus on more interpersonal means such as emailing colleagues, rather than having to post online with H-NET and the AHA listing.

A few further specific suggestions from applicants’ responses:

- Post with web sites of allied organizations like the American Studies Association.

- Post on the UK history of medicine listserv, Histmed and the JICSMAIL listserv Mersenne.
- Post in *Wellcome History*, the tri-yearly publication of the Wellcome Trust: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/About-us/Publications/Wellcome-History/index.htm>
- Send to the Md/PhD listserv.
- Continue to develop cross-posting with Canadian history of medicine listservs and history of nursing interest groups.

Committee Requests for the Council

All committee members vastly preferred receiving materials electronically (forwarding most material via email vastly cut down on the workload of Chair). We advocate that Council alter the award announcement to expressly encourage submissions via email.

We would also advocate a bit more clarity about how much medicine and how much non-medical science is appropriate for those applying for this award. That's a perennial question given the award subtitle of "History of Medicine *or* Science." Perhaps a better framing might be "medicine or biomedical science"?

It is a pleasure and a privilege to read exciting, upcoming work in the field. We are pleased at how well the submissions speak for the future of the history of medicine.

Thank you, on behalf of our whole committee, for the Council's consideration and interest in the Pressman-Burroughs Wellcome Career Development Award.

Sincerely,

/Conevery Valencius/

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